



PDF Guide

Lawyerist's Complete Guide on How to Start a Law Firm

You're ready to start your own law firm. More than that, you're ready to start a *healthy* law firm that brings you satisfaction and purpose. You've probably asked your lawyer friends for advice or combed through articles with conflicting ideas. There's a lot of information out there! Good news: we've distilled the most important parts of how to start a law firm in this guide.

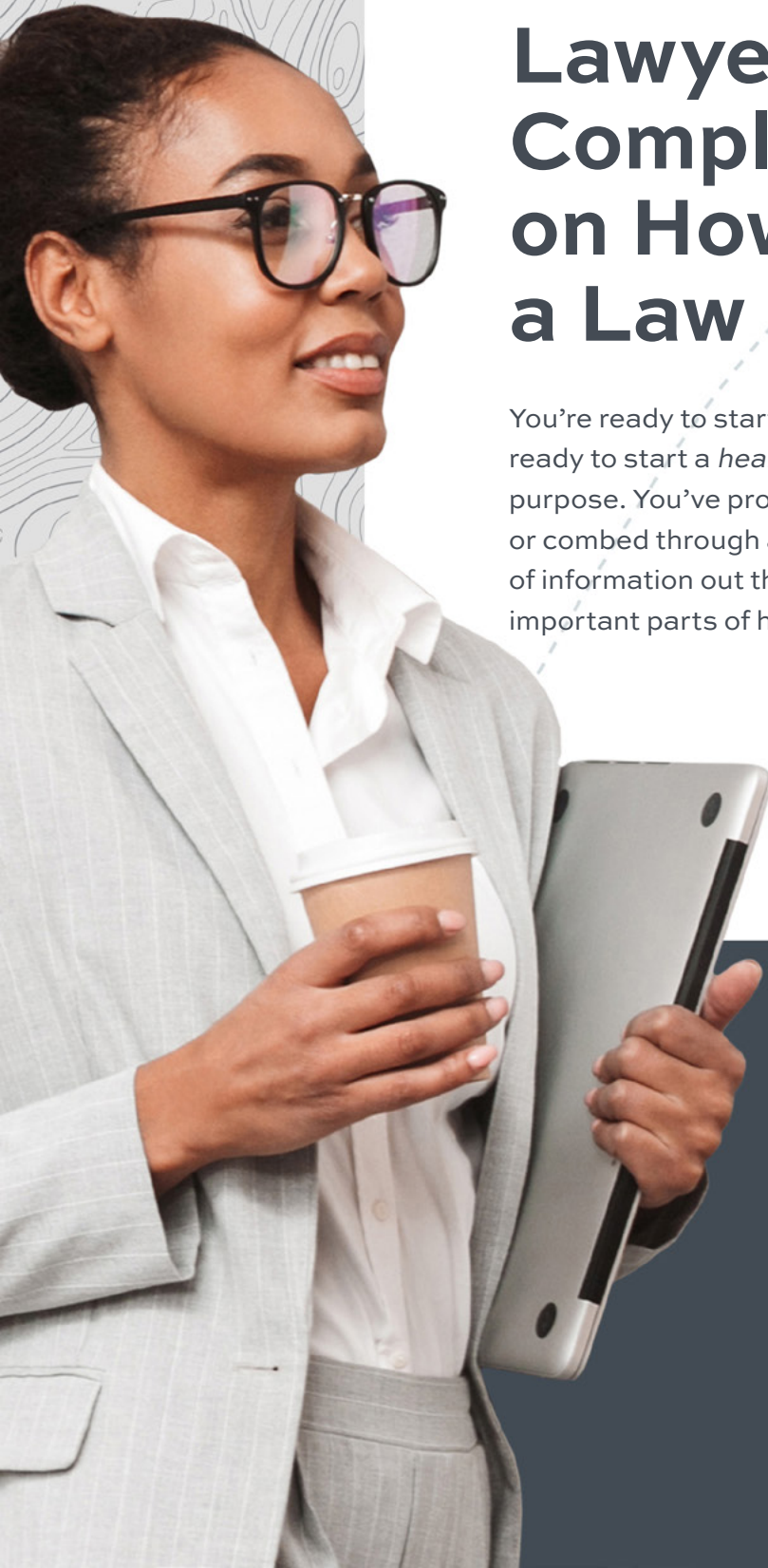
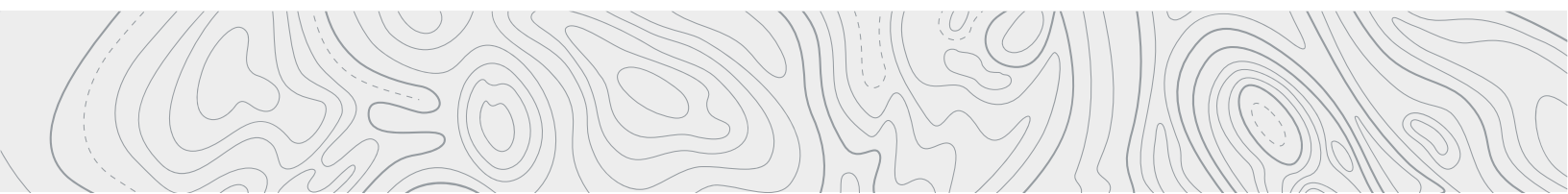


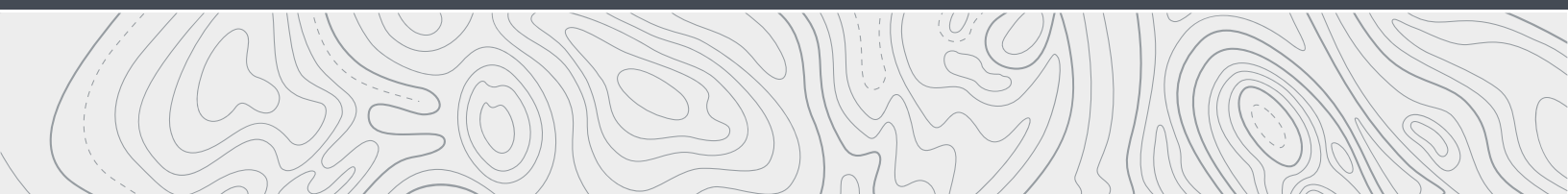
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Chapter 1

Should You Start a Law Firm?



Law practice is a business and a profession. Successfully starting your own law firm requires you to see it as both.

The skills to run a business and practice law aren't the same. Many of the skills needed to practice law will help you in your business. Running your business, though, will introduce problems and require solutions not commonly taught in law school. These challenges don't go away as your business matures and grows. They change and challenge you in new ways.

Starting Your Own Law Firm: Is It Time?

Let us guess. You're here because you're in one of these situations:

- You're drowning in your current firm. You're exhausted, overworked, and know there has to be a better way.
- You're just out of school. You know you don't want to go into big law.
- You used to have your own firm but abandoned it. Now you're questioning if that was a mistake.

You've found yourself wondering: should I start my own law firm? And if so, *how* do I start my own law firm?

We'll hit the *how* in a bit. Let's start with the *should*.

We'll tell you the big secret: you shouldn't start your own firm if you love being a lawyer.

Of course, enjoying the law helps. But, you should only start a law firm if you're interested in running a business and all it entails.

Yes, we know law school didn't teach you business skills. Although, we think this should change. It's likely that you might not have those skills right now. But, if you want to start your own firm, you must begin with the desire to learn and embrace the business finesse it will take to succeed.

Practicing Law and Owning a Business Are Different

One December 23, Lab Coach Stephanie got a call from an exasperated attorney. He was frustrated that the associate he had spent so much time training had just given notice. “Listen. I just want to practice law and maybe do some business development work. I don’t want to deal with all this other stuff!”

This attitude is just fine—if you’re working within a firm you don’t own. But, owning a business will require you to deal with “all this other stuff.”

Are you ready to take on those challenges?

[\[Check out Stephanie’s podcast on Starting Your Own Law Firm here.\]](#)

Listen, of course, it’s OK to decide that you don’t want or like doing the work of running a business and choose not to start a firm.

But, if you still think starting your own law firm is the right for you, think about these questions:

- Do I actually want to be involved in the entire running of the business?
- Am I committed to being a business owner and leader – not just an attorney?
- Do I like creating something from scratch?
- Am I ok with being uncomfortable? Do I have a high tolerance for risk?

Did you say “yes” to all four?? OK! Let’s continue.



Benefits of Starting Your Own Law Firm

Are you a lawyer with an entrepreneurial spirit, a tolerance for risk, and goals around what you want to build? You can and should start your own law firm.

There are many benefits to being the owner of your own firm, including:

- **The ability to do more than practice law.** Sure, your legal services will be your bread and butter, but you'll also be able to build a business on your terms.
- **Control when choosing your clients.** Most attorneys have a specific type of law they wish to practice. With your own firm, you choose your clients and cases.
- **The chance to develop a business model that works for you (and your clients and team).** As someone else's employee, you may have little control over the firm's business model. As the owner of your own firm, you make the decisions, including those tied to your business model.

Do Your Career Goals Include Law Firm Ownership?

If you never set goals, how do you find out what you truly want? "Success" and "accomplishments" can be vague notions. Remember that what others define as happiness, security, and fulfillment may not align with what you believe those things to be.

If you're unsure of how you'd like to move forward, first define and understand your "why." Start by asking yourself questions such as:

- Why did you go to law school?
- What kind of impact do you want your work to have on the world?
- How do you want to be known professionally?
- What must happen for you to feel like your career was a success?

Start by understanding what's most important to you and your career. Then evaluate if firm ownership is the best path to finding professional success.

Get Ready to Go All-In

While there are a ton of benefits to starting your own law firm, there are challenges, too. Even if you do everything right, it can still feel overwhelming at times.

As a new business owner and entrepreneur, you have to go all in. Be ready to put in the time and energy it will take to get your business off the ground. Know that everything you accomplish each day is investing in your firm's future health and well-being.

Bottom line: if you've read this far and still feel the pull of your own legal practice, then you're in the right place. Let's move on to the "how."

We'll cover financing next.

Chapter 2

Funding & Financing a New Law Firm



Inevitably, the first law firm financing questions we hear from lawyers are: (1) How much does it cost to start a law firm? And (2) How do I find law firm funding?

Law Firm Financing for New Firms

Let's start with this: If you're coming from a big firm, don't apply big firm financing philosophies to your small firm. You will hemorrhage money if your first steps are to hire a huge staff, buy expensive tools, and flash out your office.

Gone are the days—especially as the world goes more remote—of needing a luxurious-feeling office space to impress your clients. In fact, we'll wager that an accessible space is more important for a client-centered practice than a luxury office. (More on that later.)

Readjust your mindset to fund on a smaller scale.

But, before you start throwing out cash—before you start even looking for law firm funding—it's time to get a strategy in place.

Creating a Long-Term Financial Strategy for Your Firm

Any healthy business, including law firms, should have a written plan to forecast revenue, expenses, net profit, and cash reserves. But first, you need to understand your financial goals.

We know: You're just starting. Who can think about five years from now? We want you to relax and dream a little. Planning your financial strategy now will help you smartly figure out the law firm funding you need to get started. You're not locked into these numbers. They will change as you change and grow.

First, you must consider where you want your business to be in one year, three years, and five years. Once you visualize those goals, start outlining the steps to get there. These are the backbone of your financial strategy.

Hot tip: Since you're in the beginning stages, these are wishlist numbers. You will adjust these numbers as you get a handle on your funds. Balance reality with dreams.

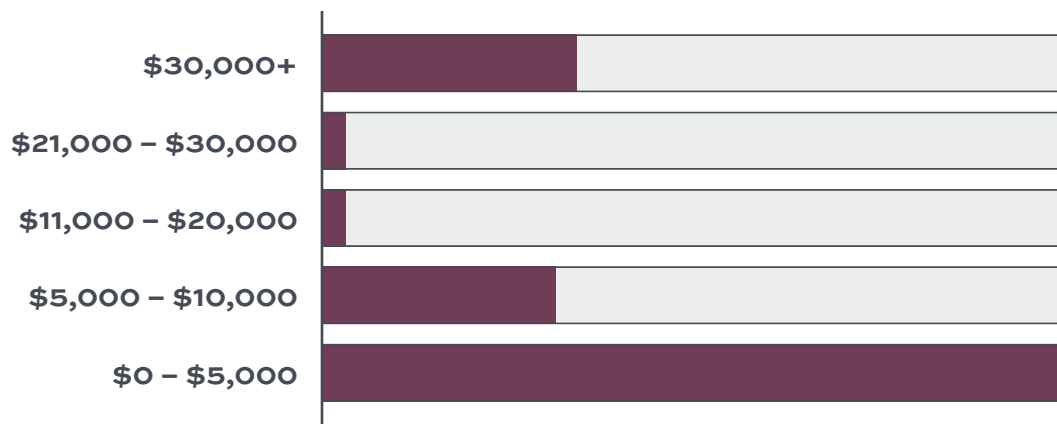
Ask yourself:

- What is the bare minimum I could make and still survive?
- What do I need to make to continue my current lifestyle?
- What amount would improve my lifestyle?
- What is the best-case scenario, profit-wise?
- What savings, assets, and potential for loans do I have to cushion the start?
- What financial goals do I have for the firm in the first one to five years?

The Practical Minimum Costs of Law Firm Financing

When you start a legal practice, you will need to spend some money at the outset—it isn't optional. According to our experience and data over the years, \$3,000 is an okay starting point. Although, \$5,000 to \$15,000 is more practical to have a solid footing for your first law firm. The cost depends on a wide range of variables, such as location, practice area, advertising, and more.

We polled members of our Lawyerist Facebook group on how much start-up capital they had when they opened their firm and they said:



Overwhelmingly, most attorneys had less than \$5,000 in the bank when they started. So it's possible, but let's break it down.

Personal Expenses

In addition to the money needed to get your business off the ground, you'll need to keep yourself housed and fed. It may take some time for your business to be in a solid position and pay you a salary or distribution. You should have some personal money saved to cover your living expenses for the first three to six months.

Professional Expenses

Plan for professional expenses such as licensing, continuing legal education, conferences and events, malpractice insurance, and memberships. Both licensing and legal education aren't optional. You'll also need [different types of insurance](#).

Office & Supplies

The office comes first (as it is often your largest expense outside of salaries). The good news is that this is an optional expense. If the global pandemic taught us anything, it's that you can run a firm out of your house with a desk, computer, and basic supplies. Whatever gets you started, do it. Don't waste too much time finding the perfect office space. You can quickly get caught up in buying furniture, technology, and supplies, and soon discover that you're drowning in minutiae and overhead.

Many more attorneys are finding success with a virtual practice. This is an excellent option to keep your overhead low. It also allows you to determine how much space you need before you lock yourself into a long-term lease. If you plan on securing a physical space, give yourself a buffer and a timeline. A standard timeline is to have a space arranged and rent money six to twelve months after starting your practice. Do whatever feels right to you.

As you purchase office supplies, only buy what you need. We've all gotten excited about a new space and bought fancy chairs, expensive espresso machines, art, and on and on. Buying cool office decor can be a great distraction from working on your actual business plan. Don't fall for it!

Try to rein in the urge to make your office look expensive. If you have transparent, client-centered services and a human touch, your clients won't care what your office looks like.

Hardware

In your office space, you'll need a computer, backup service, document scanner, and a phone or phone service.

Legal Software & Services

Legal software and online services will be the tools you use the most daily in your practice. Don't rush into buying any of these items. First, make a list of tasks you'll need done and how you'd like those tasks to flow through the day. (We call these workflows.) We've all seen lawyers jump into buying new tech without figuring out how they'll use it first.

Once you have that plan, consider:

- Google Workspace or Microsoft Office for email, calendar, and documents.
- Paperless and data security office tools such as a remote backup and external hard drive
- [Law practice management software](#)
- [Accounting software](#)
- [Timekeeping and billing software](#) (if it is not part of your practice management software)
- [Legal research tools](#)

At some point, you'll want to think about your marketing budget, but in the beginning, it's OK to stick to the freebies. Set up social media accounts, get referrals from friends and colleagues, and build a basic, free website with your firm's information. When you're ready to jump into marketing in-depth, check out our [Guide to Law Firm Marketing](#).

Now that you know how much money you'll need initially, let's explore how to finance it.



How to Get Law Firm Funding

To open your own firm, you'll need some cash to cover your business's initial expenses plus operating costs for several months. Let's dive into how firms can fund or finance those expenses.

Lines of Credit

A line of credit is typically offered by a bank or credit union. It gives you access to money as you need it, and you can draw up to a maximum amount for a set period of time. Lines of credit are flexible, allowing you to continuously borrow the funds you pay back. You also don't pay any interest until you borrow.

Business lines of credit are often unsecured, which means you don't need to put forth any collateral to secure the credit. These typically come with higher interest rates, however. Lines of credit are best for short-term projects, such as office renovations or upgrading your equipment.

Credit Cards

Credit cards are similar to lines of credit, but with a few key differences. For example, a credit card doesn't have a draw period, so you can use it as long as the account is open. If you want actual cash in hand (like you'd receive from your line of credit), you'll need to perform a cash advance on your card. This often comes at extremely high-interest rates, which can cost you.

Speaking of high interest rates, credit cards come with higher rates than the other lending options listed here. With some cards, you may be able to pay the balance off each month and avoid interest charges. That makes them an often ideal choice for day-to-day spending within your firm.

Small Business Loans

Small business loans are tailored specifically for business owners just getting started. In general, we recommend avoiding small business loans for law firm financing or funding. Typically, these loans require you to leverage your own home or other assets to secure it, bringing a fair amount of risk to the table.

Friend & Family Loans

Loans from friends or family may come with the added benefit of a low-interest rate. But they can also come with strings attached that can strain a relationship if you don't pay it back on time. Before you reach out for help from a friend or family member, seriously weigh your comfort level with the relationship.

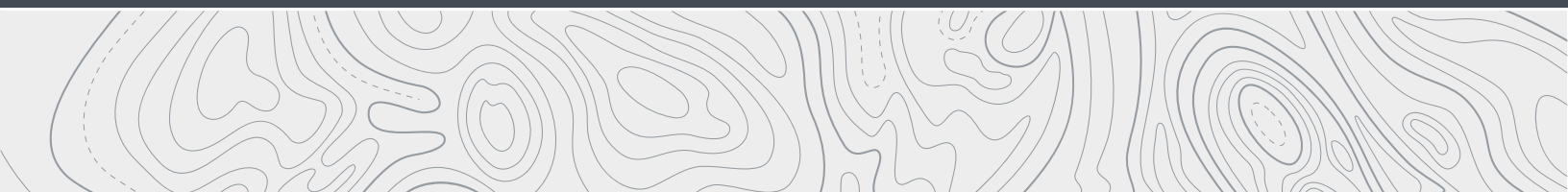
Using Credit & Loan Funds for Cash Flow

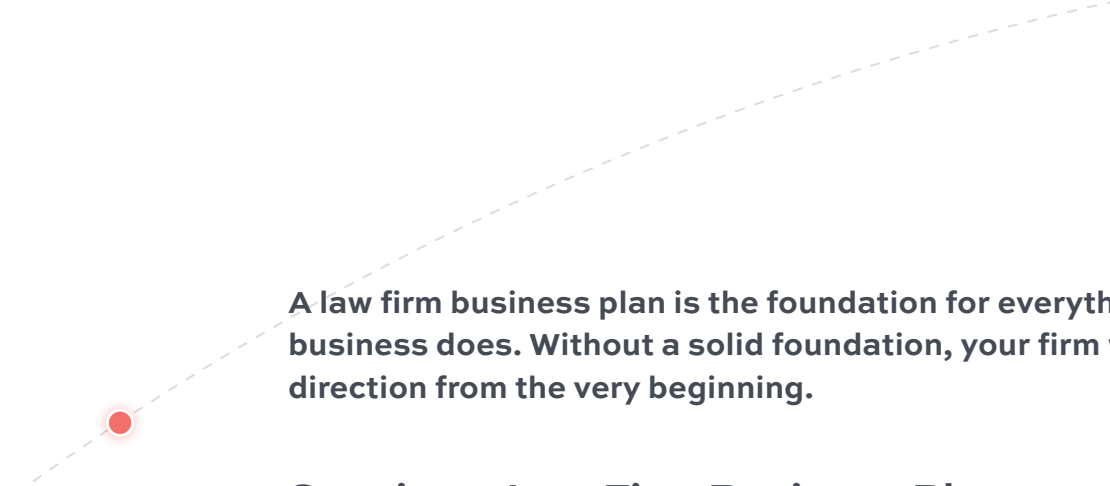
Although credit cards and loans are available, you should only use them if you are confident in your profitability. If you can demonstrate that you will have the cash later, access the credit if you need. If you're not sure when you'll have the money to pay your debts, though, accessing credit or loans may not be the best option for your firm.

Have a handle on the basics of law firm funding and financing? Then let's move to your next step: your new law firm business plan.

Chapter 3

Developing a Business Plan for a New Law Firm





A law firm business plan is the foundation for everything your business does. Without a solid foundation, your firm will lack direction from the very beginning.

Starting a Law Firm Business Plan

A good business plan includes:

- **Vision.** Create a picture of what you're building.
- **Values.** Identify the rules to guide your team's important work.
- **Law Firm Business Model:** What you offer, who you offer it to, and how you'll deliver your services.
- **Targets and Priorities.** Clarify metrics that indicate success.

Law Firm Vision

We worked with a lawyer who was stressed out about his vision. He spent weeks on the assignment because he couldn't think of a statement that would make his entire office happy.

During one coaching session, he got that lightbulb moment when we told him that he was making too big of a deal of it. You don't have to create the most amazing vision that perfectly captures everything you are hoping to build. You do need to start mapping out what you are (and aren't) trying to create.

Picture these two lawyers:

- Lawyer 1 wants to double the size of his team in the next two years so he can handle more cases, help more people, and make more money.
- Lawyer 2 does not enjoy managing people. She wants to build a technology-based solution that she can offer clients with a recurring monthly price and that is delivered using a few key team members.

Neither vision is wrong. But, how each lawyer will make decisions to build a profitable business will look very different. You need to get a sense if you are trying to build something that looks more like Lawyer 1, Lawyer 2, or Lawyers 3-8. Get it?

Jot down thoughts now so you know where you're headed and can start building the guardrails for future decisions.

Law Firm Values

Your values are a living embodiment of the firm culture you're hoping to create and the approach to work your team shares. They are the guardrails of your business.

From hiring to client management to a marketing strategy, every decision you make comes from your values.

Your values are typically 3-6 factual statements that are authentically you.

Here are some tips on crafting great values:

- **Your values must concretely point to your business.** You want achievable values that set your business up for success.
- **Your values must have actual meaning.** Like the “be the best lawyer” example, you want to avoid the obvious. Sure, every firm wants to be the best. But what does *your* firm want to do that sets you apart from the crowd?
- **Finally, avoid table stakes values.** Honesty, integrity, and hard work are all good works that all companies should have. But, they have nothing to do with your specific goals vs. any other firm.

As an example, here are [Lawyerist's values](#):

1. Build an Inclusive Community.
2. Experiment Like a Lobster.
3. Grab the Marker.
4. Seek Candor.
5. Grow as People.

Each of these represents the culture of our company (even “[Experiment Like a Lobster](#),” which describes our playful and out-of-the-box thinking process). We use these values for all of our decisions, especially hiring. When we evaluate a candidate, we study their fit: Are they open to experimenting? Are they willing to help us build an [inclusive community](#)? Are they eager to lean into [candor and compassion](#)?

Building your [vision and values](#) is an essential first step for your business. We can't tell you how much easier other decisions will flow once you have these documented. You will make better decisions and alleviate some of the anxiety of decision fatigue.

Law Firm Business Model

One of the biggest perks of starting your firm is deciding your law firm business plan and model. You get to take everything you learned in school and while working at other organizations and implement the parts you like. Even better, you get to leave out the details that stressed you out.

This is an excellent place to review your vision and values. Take the time to dream about this. This is often the most rewarding part for new law firm owners. With a smart strategy, you can build your dream firm. Ask yourself:

- What [kind of place](#) do I want to work in every day?
- What kind of clients do I want to serve? Who is my [ideal client](#)?
- What type of [pricing model](#) do I want?
- What kind of [access to justice](#) issues do I want to tackle?
- What [experience](#) do I want my clients to have? How do I want them to describe my firm?

You get the gist. The questions you can ask yourself here are endless, but use your vision and values to inform your model. For example, if one of your values is "[grow as people](#)," you might offer education opportunities for clients in areas related to their cases.

The important part is, it's all up to you. This is yours. You get to decide.

Competitive Analysis

As part of finalizing your law firm business model, it can be very helpful to complete a competitive analysis. A competitive analysis not only forces you to define who your competitors are, it gives you a chance to determine what may be missing in the market so that you can address it.

Lawyers often assume as long as they practice law, there's a market for what they want to do. Or they think they're only competing against other lawyers when clients are often drawn to non-law solutions.

These lawyers are missing a huge opportunity. They aren't asking clients how they heard about their firm. They're not trying to figure out what other solutions their clients tried first. They aren't looking at what clients want and how the market is attempting to respond.

Here are some tips for putting together a competitive analysis:

- **Make a list of competitors.** Simple, right? List firms in your practice area/location, your jurisdiction, and who may be serving your ideal client base.
- **List the other ways your clients are solving their problems.** Are they using an online service to create their will? Are they asking their cousin's nephew's wife, who once worked at a law firm in 1988, for advice? Get creative.
- **Do field research.** Ask your friends, family, and current clients what they do when they have a potential legal problem.

Once you've collected the data, you can begin the analysis. Think about the strengths and weaknesses of each competitor and the solution you've collected. Compare pricing, accessibility, marketing messages, and client service. How does it all compare to your firm? What do you do better? What could you improve?

And keep in mind: this isn't a one-time deal. You'll want to stay on top of competitive solutions through Google or social media alerts or by subscribing to industry emails and newsletters. At least once a year, do a complete forensic competitive analysis to see where things have changed.

Targets and Priorities

When you're first starting a law firm business plan, you may just have a goal of "get my firm up and running." A good goal! But, as you dream on your initial strategy, it's helpful to set some initial short-term and excellent long-term goals. Yes, these goals may change as you learn and grow. But, setting goals upfront will give you a path to get started.

Short-term Goals

Look to your initial vision and values for your first goals. If you're a family law firm that wants to do low-conflict divorces, you might have a client acquisition goal aligned with this.

For example, you could say: In the first six months of my firm opening, I want 50% of my new clients to be low-conflict separations and divorces. You'll see this goal follows the S.M.A.R.T. formula: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound.

Another short-term goal might be systems-oriented: I want a written client onboarding process documented in my first three months. (If not implemented.)

Think through all the different parts of your business and see if you can achieve one short-term goal.

Long-term Goals

Long-term goals can be a little trickier when you're first starting. Thinking one, two, or even five years out might seem impossible. But this is where you can begin to dream a little.

A long-term goal might be that in three years, you want a staff of five people, a complete operations manual, 50 new clients a year, and Fridays off each week.

Remember, these goals might—and likely will—change. But give yourself something to work with in the beginning.



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

As you're starting a law firm business plan, you'll need a way to measure your firm's health. These measurements are called KPIs. They track goals in all parts of your business, from marketing to finances to client acquisition.

Measuring and monitoring your KPIs will allow you to:

- **Monitor the health of your firm.** KPIs will enable you to see how well your law firm is performing. For example, KPIs make it easy to track your finances and your firm's monthly growth. You'll see problems and successes quickly and be able to take action by creating new goals or redirecting your team's efforts.
- **Simplify decision-making.** Armed with the above information, you can make informed, rational decisions for everything in your business. You don't have to guess if a decision is the right one. Instead, you can (and should) measure all variables to make the best decision for your firm's future.
- **Track your wins.** By tracking your KPIs, you track your wins. Monitoring law firm data makes it simple to incentivize your staff's hard work. After all, when you meet your numbers, everyone benefits.

For example, at Lawyerist, we track KPIs with a color-coded system.

Green means hitting our goal, yellow means we're on the cusp, and red means not hitting the number. We track weekly, which means when something goes yellow, we can analyze and plan before it goes red.

And, because we track weekly, a one-week red doesn't mean an emergency. It means we need to take time to discuss, find a cause, and make a plan.

Types of KPIs for Successful Firms

KPIs can cover all aspects of your business, including your finances, client satisfaction, marketing, and business development. Keep in mind, as you start your firm, KPIs will be new to you and can feel overwhelming. So, keep it simple in the beginning.

Start by picking three business questions you want answered. Find a way to measure that answer that you can track and update without too much work regularly. Then, start measuring. As your firm grows, you'll develop your KPIs.

Let's look at some examples.

Financial KPIs

Want to increase your revenue or improve your law firm's financial health? You'll want to track some [financial KPIs](#), including (but not limited to):

- Revenue (cash collected)
- Monthly amount invoiced to clients
- Accounts receivable (amount clients owe you)
- Budgeted expenses

Regardless of your goals, we recommend tracking some basic financial data to keep an eye on the health of your firm. For a quick win, narrow down your financial KPIs to the top three financial numbers needed to understand your business.

Client Satisfaction KPIs

Your clients are your most valuable assets. Firm success requires that you watch specific metrics involving your clients.

Client satisfaction KPIs connect to several key law firm growth goals. These include increasing referrals, increasing revenue (happy clients are loyal clients), and improving overall client experience.

Examples of KPIs to track include:

- Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- Client retention rate
- Speed at which you close cases

Your Net Promoter Score measures whether current or former clients would recommend your legal services to others. A satisfied client is more likely to do so. This metric is most often gathered using a survey at the final delivery of your services.

Other measures, such as closing speed and retention, can give you insights into how happy your clients are with your services. Do you have a lower NPS than you expect? Are you losing clients? If so, your client satisfaction is low, and you could take action to improve it.

Marketing and Business Development KPIs

Is your current marketing strategy working? Without measuring KPIs, there's no way of knowing. By tracking marketing metrics for your firm, you can see your marketing strategy's performance and tweak where needed.

Some of these metrics include:

- Organic traffic to your website
- Number of leads generated
- Conversion rates
- Acquisition costs/return on investment (ROI)

For example, if you see your website traffic trending down, some fresh content might do the trick. Or, if you see low conversion rates yet high traffic, your website isn't inspiring potential clients to give you a call. You might need to change your call-to-actions or refresh your website.

Marketing and business development go hand-in-hand—as they're both critical to achieving long-term growth goals.

Some examples of business development metrics to track include:

- Number of new clients each month
- Competitor pricing
- Sales cycle length
- Number of leads that turn into consultations

Profitability KPIs and Law Firm Financial Ratios

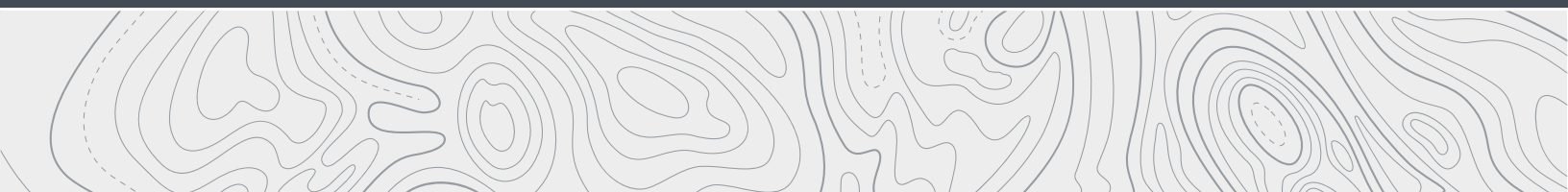
Every law firm should have a documented long-term financial strategy and profitability model. Any healthy business has a written plan to forecast revenue, expenses, net profit, and cash reserves. To ensure you follow through with your plan, track your firm's profitability and financial KPIs.

And where should you track these KPIs? Don't think too hard on that one. At Lawyerist, we use a Google Sheets spreadsheet with a few simple formulas. Track anywhere that [makes sense for your firm](#).

Next, we'll outline how to use legal technology successfully.

Chapter 4

Legal Technology and Services for New Law Firms



Now that you’ve nailed down your business vision, let’s turn to the legal technology tools you’ll need to run a successful practice.

First, a warning: lawyers often skip the steps before this chapter because they’re excited about researching shiny new tools.

Legal Technology Tools for Your New Law Firm

If you dive into buying a new [law practice management system](#) or [virtual receptionist service](#) before you know your vision, you’ll hemorrhage money. Lay out the vision, then work on the tools.

But if you’re in the other camp—where technology scares you, and you don’t know where to start—we’ve got you covered, too.

Technology is strategy.

Types of Legal Technology Tools for Your New Firm

First, let’s go over the kinds of technology you might use in your firm:

- **Basic hardware and equipment.** Think computers and printers.
- **A legal practice management system.** An LPMS will be the organizational home base for your cases and clients.
- **A scanner.** You want to be paperless, so invest in a fast, durable scanner. (More on this in a moment.)
- **Office software.** You’ll need a suite of tools to manage your email, documents, calendar, and interoffice communication.
- **A phone system and/or virtual receptionist.** Your choice here will depend on your vision for the business.
- **Client Relationship Management software (CRM).** If your LPMS doesn’t include this feature, you’ll want a separate system to keep track of your leads and potential clients.
- **Data threat security tools.** You’re working with confidential information and will need to keep that info secure.

Read our [Complete Guide to Legal Tech](#) to learn more about each tool.

Creating a Paperless Law Firm

Starting a paperless law firm will save you a world of headaches in the long run.

For example, we know an established attorney who was in the middle of converting his office to paperless. He still had boxes of documents shoved in his office corners. And, before he could scan them all, his office roof leaked during a terrible storm. His documents were ruined, and there weren't backup copies.

While soggy documents may be a worst-case scenario, paper-based systems offer a host of challenges. These include needing physical storage space, outmoded organizational structures, and time spent flipping through file folders and scanning or mailing documents to clients. It's time to lose the paper copy.

Going paperless:

- **Saves time.** Time spent doing office work should count just as much as billing clients. There's no need to search through hundreds of files to find one document. Instead, you'll have every document filed neatly in a searchable database. Plus, filing is simple and done at the push of a button.
- **Saves money.** The typical office employee uses more than ten thousand sheets of paper [per year](#), around two cases. The average cost of a case of paper is anywhere between \$30 and \$50, adding up to some serious numbers over time. Combine that with the cost of filing systems, labels, and more, it gets pretty easy to visualize the cost savings of removing paper.
- **Improves the client experience.** Imagine misplacing an important document from your client's file or spending fifteen minutes of your client's time searching for their file. When offering a solid client experience, these minutes matter. Going paperless eliminates these mishaps, improving the way you serve your clients.
- **Enhances firm security.** Through electronic document management practices, it's simple to restrict access or password protect your files and critical client information. Should a natural disaster or office theft occur, you'll have multiple offsite backups of your files through cloud hosting services. It's also easier to remain compliant when your office is paperless.

- **Boosts productivity.** Becoming a paperless law firm also means going mobile, allowing you to access your files and documents anywhere. Plus, you can use the time you save by going paperless for more important business matters such as client work, marketing, and more.

Want to learn more? Check out our [Complete Guide to Managing a Law Firm](#).

Automation and Systems

Automation will change your life. The human brain can't keep up with modern demands. You *will* forget stuff. If your energy is spent manually performing your tasks, you will be burned out by 10am.

However, before you set up automatic processes, you'll want to sketch out what kind of systems you'll automate (for example, client onboarding).

Document:

- Each of your office tasks.
- The workflow those systems will follow.

Then, you'll fill in the gaps with legal technology tools that will help you automate those systems. To learn more, check out our [Guide to Managing a Law Firm](#).

Working Remotely

While the Lawyerist team has been [remote from day one](#), many lawyers are new to the concept. Since you don't know when a pandemic might hit that forces you to work from home, you want to make sure your law firm can quickly go mobile if needed.

You'll want to make sure you:

- **Offer team members the resources and equipment they need to work from home.** Whether this means paying for their internet or sending a computer home with them, you'll want to mirror the setup they would have at an office.

- **Develop remote-friendly systems and workflows.** Successful remote firms rely heavily on clear, remote-first systems.
- **Double down on team culture.** You won't have those chats at the water cooler in a remote firm, so you'll need to make sure you encourage casual socialization and bonding in other ways.
- **Determine the legal technology you'll need for remote work.** While this legal tech may look similar to an in-person setup, you'll want to make sure you have seamless systems.

We go over this in more detail in [Complete Guide to Managing a Law Firm](#).

Data Security

Law firms need to be on top of their data security more than most organizations. Not only do you need to have a handle on your security, but the ABA also mandates it. According to Comment 8, Rule 1.1., lawyers must stay up-to-date on the risks and benefits of the technology.

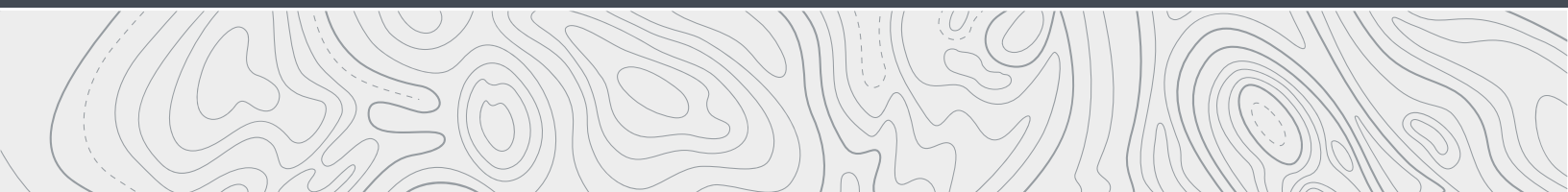
The ABA also requires you to keep [data protected and confidential](#) and keep your clients' information [safe from destruction](#).

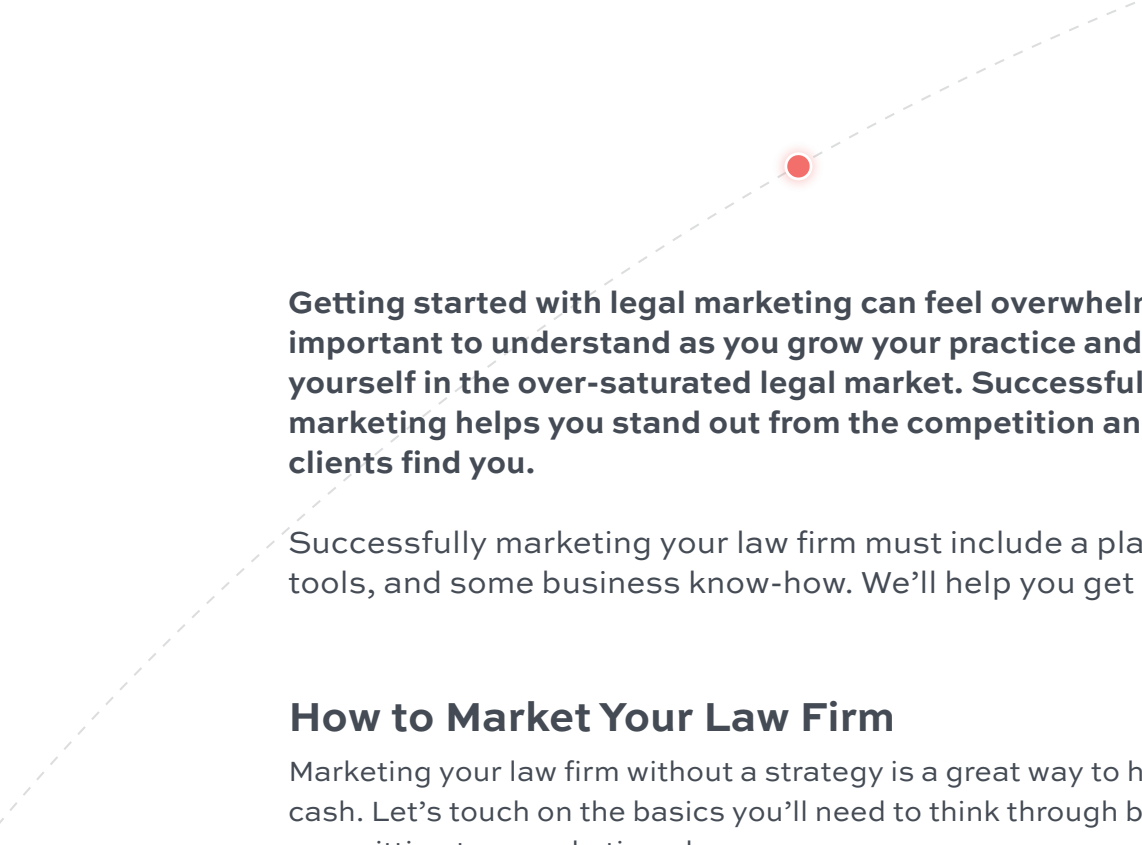
In other words, you can't skip on data security. Learn how to protect your data in our [Complete Guide to Legal Tech](#).

Next, let's dig into your marketing plan for your new firm.

Chapter 5

Marketing a New Law Firm





Getting started with legal marketing can feel overwhelming. It's important to understand as you grow your practice and distinguish yourself in the over-saturated legal market. Successful legal marketing helps you stand out from the competition and helps clients find you.

Successfully marketing your law firm must include a plan, marketing tools, and some business know-how. We'll help you get started.

How to Market Your Law Firm

Marketing your law firm without a strategy is a great way to hemorrhage cash. Let's touch on the basics you'll need to think through before committing to a marketing plan.

The Client Journey

As you sit down to sketch out your marketing plan, start by putting yourself in your clients' shoes and imagining their journey.

The journey is the story of a client's experience from the moment they first interact with you (e.g., Google search, referral, or billboard) to when they get their first bill, get their problem fully and finally resolved, pay their last bill, provide your firm a 5-star online review, and become one of your best referral sources.

You'll want to consider these client stages:

- **Awareness:** They have a problem and start to search for answers.
- **Consideration:** They know they need an attorney and consider options.
- **Decision:** They're ready to choose a firm.

How can you help your client at each of these stages? What parts of your marketing can enhance these stages? Learn more in our [Complete Guide to Law Firm Clients](#).

Ideal Client

When lawyers start their firm, it's tempting to take anyone who walks in the door. You're trying to establish yourself, build up a base, and get money in the bank. We get it.

But, by cramming in [every client who asks](#) for your services, you'll end up with clients who drive you bonkers. Or even worse, you won't use your top skills.

Think of it another way. Imagine a music teacher who specializes in private guitar and piano lessons.

If a potential student walked in who wanted to learn the trumpet and the teacher said yes, both teacher and student would struggle through the lesson. Everyone would be stressed, and the horn player wouldn't learn what they needed.

You can avoid this stress by identifying the type of client who dovetails with your skills, preferences, and area demographics.

You can figure out your ideal client in Chapter 1 of our [Guide to Law Firm Clients](#).

Branding

Your branding is your relationship with the world. It's your promise to your clients. It's how the world identifies you—whether through your logo, a catchy slogan, or adjectives that describe your style.

As an example, we know a lawyer who loves gardening. As she was starting her firm, she wanted to intertwine an organic, earthy feeling into her branding. Her aim was to convey the type of experience her clients would have at her firm.

So, she named her firm Heirloom (after a type of tomato) and centered her colors and copy on this concept.

Think of products and organizations that have caught your eye over the years. Make a list, then identify colors, sayings, and feelings associated with each brand. Learn about [branding](#) in Chapter 1 of our [Guide to Law Firm Marketing](#).

Website

You know you need a website in your law firm marketing toolbox. However, what comes next isn't always straightforward.

At a minimum, your website is your calling card. Clients can find your address, phone number, and practice areas. They can confirm you're a legitimate business when they Google you. (They will Google you.)

Your site is also a marketing tool to post blogs, videos, accolades, and testimonials.

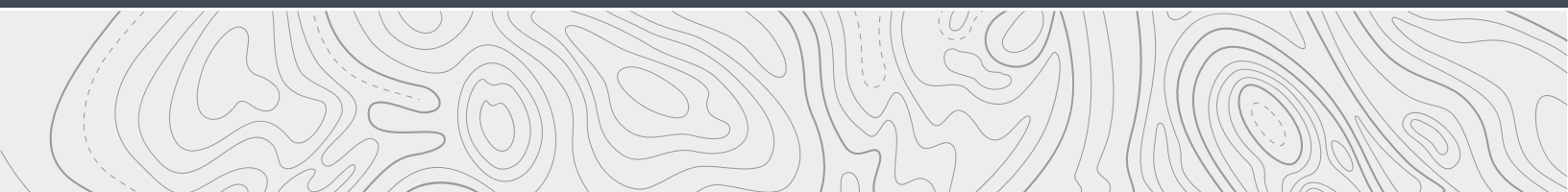
In its most aspirational form, your website is a client-centered hub. You could turn your website into a one-stop-shop for client education, with a portal for clients to get updates on their cases. (For inspiration, see our latest [Best Law Firm Websites contest](#).)

Before you go big, start with just getting a site up, so your clients don't think you're a scam shop. We go into more detail on how to get started with your website in our [Complete Guide to Law Firm Website Design](#).

Now that you have the foundations of how to market your law firm, let's talk about running your new law firm on your own.

Chapter 6

Running a Law Firm On Your Own



OK. It's time. You've done the legwork. You're feeling good about your progress. You're ready to dig into running a law firm.

Indeed, starting a law firm is not for hesitant hearts. The good news is, you don't need to do this without support—and you probably shouldn't.

How to Run a Law Firm on Your Own

Law firms are both complex and fast-moving, requiring firm leaders to be strategic with the creation and implementation of systems. As a lawyer, it's easy to focus all your attention on your clients. While clients are a critical part of your practice, your firm won't run itself.

You'll need:

- **An organizational chart.** This clarifies accountabilities.
- **Hiring and Staffing.** Even solos need additional support.
- **Outsourcing.** What will you do in house and what will you outsource?
- **Coaching.** Mentorship and accountability is vital to reaching your goals.

Organizational Chart

Let's start with who's doing what. And if it's just you in your small firm right now, that's OK. This task applies to you, too.

An [organizational chart](#)—or an accountability chart, as we call it at Lawyerist—isn't just a document that tells you who reports to whom. You don't just glance at this document once a year when you want to remember your associate's paralegal's name.

It's a lot more than that. Your organizational/accountability chart details who is responsible for what job duties and who is responsible for overseeing those duties.

For example, if your paralegal is in charge of getting your billing out, your office assistant shouldn't wonder if he was supposed to be doing that duty.

Another advantage is that you can start to see where duties are unbalanced or misaligned. This is also where solo or small firm lawyers begin to realize they're playing the CEO, the marketer, the paralegal, and the office manager—and that they might need to hire.

Documenting these duties and revising the document frequently will help you stay on top of your office's day-to-day and long-term goals.

Hiring and Staffing

Everything you've documented about your vision, values, finances, and team culture will help you make your first hire.

The first hire can be scary. We know many successful lawyers who held off on hiring, even when they were drowning in work. They couldn't imagine someone doing the job as well as they do. While that might be true, it's no reason to keep drowning.

The question we often get asked is, "When should I hire?" Luckily, there's a rule of thumb for that. Do you have:

- More work than you can handle?
- Enough money coming in to finance a hire?
- Day-to-day work you're doing that's keeping you from billable work?

If you can answer "yes" to all three, it's time to hire.

Dig deeper in our [Guide to Hiring, Staffing, and Growing a Law Firm](#).

Outsourcing

A secret to staffing is that you don't have to hire full-time employees to manage your law firm tasks. You can't outsource your daily legal work, but you could outsource:

- **Answering the phones.** There are [virtual receptionist services](#) out there that will answer calls and take messages, route, and give simple information.
- **Running social media.** Digital marketing contractors are a booming business. You don't need to have in-house work for this.
- **Office management tasks.** You don't need to run your calendar or even your email inbox. Virtual assistants exist for a reason.

These are just a few examples. Get creative: Is there a task you or a staff member are doing that doesn't require firm time or energy? Write it down, then research an [outsourcing option](#).

Coaching

Last, let's get real: running a small law firm is hard work. Now, it doesn't have to be stressful, and it certainly doesn't need to be chaotic, but it's difficult (and rewarding) work. But it can be hard to see the big picture when you're in the thick of managing.

There's a reason people who want to get physically healthier work with personal trainers. You have only so much willpower in a day. And, often, motivation to do the things you know you're "supposed to do" dwindles as the week goes on. Suddenly it's Friday, and you realize you haven't thought about marketing, team culture, or succession plans. And, the list goes on and on.

This is where a coach comes in.

As a business owner, you should have a coach who can help you see the big picture, provide accountability to your goals, and ask the questions that help you progress. An outside, neutral party can know where you're stuck and guide you through difficult decisions.

In fact, we're not sure how lawyers are running law firms without coaches! Sure, you might run decisions by your law partner or spouse, but they have stakes in your choices. You need a trained professional.

We're biased because we run a [coaching program](#) at Lawyerist, but we started it because we believe coaching is a necessary expense—not an optional one.



Take the Next Step in Building a Healthy Firm

Now that you've got the basics of starting a firm under your belt, you're ready to get going. The fun is just beginning! Now, it's time to focus on how to run and manage your firm and make all those dreams come true. Your business won't run itself. You'll need to be intentional about what you do every day to make the magic happen. Don't worry. We've got you covered.

Learn more about managing your law firm in our [Complete Guide to Managing a Law Firm](#) as part of a [Healthy Firm](#).

